

The University of Chicago

THE CULT OF ROUSSEAU AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES IN CANDIDACY
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
MARCH, 1941

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The influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau on the French Revolution is a familiar theme, and a great deal has been written during the years in attempting to assess that influence. Yet only a few vague and general conclusions have been advanced, and they are subject to serious criticism.¹ The present essay is only an indirect contribution to that study.² Influence is one thing; the cult of Rousseau is something else quite different. The study of the latter involves an analysis of the various expressions of devotion to Rousseau and admiration for his writings, which in the second half of the eighteenth century achieved the proportions of a popular cult. In part this cult was an expression of the influence which contemporaries assumed Rousseau had on this period. That supposed influence, if the word influence is used with caution, is not without significance in any precise evaluation of the actual influence which Rousseau may have had, although there can be influence without contemporaries being aware of it.

The cult of Rousseau had actually two phases, the one literary and the other political. The distinction is important, and the failure to make it has led students of the subject astray. First in point of time, and reaching its climax in the decade before the Revolution, was the literary cult, in which Rousseau was admired and honored, not for the *Contrat social*, but for the *Nouvelle Héloïse* and the *Émile*. The *Nouvelle Héloïse*, a long and sentimental novel of passionate love and marital devotion, was published in 1761; and there were more than forty editions of the book before Jean-Jacques' death thirteen years later, and more than seventy before the turn of the century.³ The almost as famous *Émile*, a treatise on education and religion, was published in 1762. These dates mark the beginning of the literary cult.

Readers of these two books found in them something for which they had been groping, something which Rousseau's rationalist

¹ Albert Schinz, *État présent des travaux sur J.-J. Rousseau* (New York, 1941), 10.

² See the author's *The Cult of Rousseau and the Revolutionary Spirit in France 1750-1800* (unpublished dissertation, University of Chicago, 1941).

³ Daniel Mornet, ed., *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (Paris, 1925), I, 178-209, 232.

contemporaries such as Voltaire and Diderot had not given them.⁴ His readers saw him as the advocate of the cause of the emotions, of romantic love and virtue, of nature and simplicity, of a devout theism; and his strange career and charming personality, for those who could penetrate his reserve and boorishness, were closely connected with the appeal of his writings. The combination could not fail to attract an intensely personal following.

The self-styled "disciples" of the author of the *Émile* and *Héloïse* put no limits to their devotion. To them he had no faults. His enemies, real and imagined, were their enemies. The young Brissot, for example, refused to have anything to do with the playwright Palissot because that worthy had once ridiculed his idol in *Les Philosophes*.⁵ The Abbé Brizard wrote of Jean-Jacques: "I have seen him, I have conversed with the wisest of men. He accepted my youth, and I never left one of his conversations without feeling my soul uplifted and my heart more virtuous."⁶ Many disciples expressed their feelings in letters to their idol. "Man that I dare compare to the divinity," one admiring correspondent called the author of the *Émile*.⁷ Female readers of the *Héloïse* were even more extravagant. Mme. de Latour de Franqueville, one of his most faithful disciples, wrote: "I have your portrait—and I have placed it above the table which serves me as secretary, exactly as a believer places above her oratory the image of the saint for whom she has the most fervent devotion."⁸ Rousseau's rudeness in his last years alienated some of his admirers, but others came forward to take their places. One of these was the Marquis de Girardin, and it was to his estate at Ermenonville, just north of Paris, that Jean-Jacques retired in 1778. Here he died a few months later,

⁴ For detailed studies of the significance of this, see the various writings of Daniel Mornet, notably *Le Romantisme en France au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1912), and the Introduction to his edition of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Albert Schinz (*op. cit.*, 396 and *passim*) has summarized the results of recent studies which have presented a "vrai Rousseau" who was a rationalist, rather than the romantic "Rousseau de la légende." But this "Rousseau de la légende" was in fact the Rousseau of the cult.

⁵ J.-P. Brissot, *Mémoires*, ed. by Cl. Perroud (Paris, 1911), I, 88–91.

⁶ "Socrate et Jean-Jacques, ou Parallèle de Jean-Jacques Rousseau avec Socrate," Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris, MS 6099.

⁷ La Vaché to Rousseau, June 13, 1765, quoted in P. M. Masson, *La Religion de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, vol. III, *Rousseau et la Restauration religieuse* (Paris, 1916), 74.

⁸ July 9, 1769, *Correspondance Générale de J.-J. Rousseau*, ed. by Théophile Dufour (Paris, 1924–34), XIX, 129.

and was buried on the tiny Isle of Poplars in one of the lakes on the estate.

The sudden death of Rousseau brought certain changes to the cult which had begun to take form during his lifetime. A new generation of disciples arose, new means of expression took their place alongside the old, and the literary cult came to completion in the decade between 1778 and the outbreak of the Revolution.

An iconography of Rousseau appeared now, as portraits, prints, statuettes and busts were produced to satisfy an apparently inexhaustible market for such items.⁹ Most popular of all were the numerous engravings of scenes from his life, his writings, and his tomb, accompanied by symbolical representations and laudatory verses. In one entitled "Arrival of J.-J. Rousseau in the Elysian Fields," Rousseau is pictured stepping from Charon's boat, as Socrates, Plato, Plutarch, Montaigne and others crowd forward to welcome him; and Diogenes having finished his quest, blows out his lamp.¹⁰ The religious quality of the cult is clearly illustrated in a plate which presents Rousseau, dead, held by two women who wind his body in a sheet.¹¹

The cult held a prominent place in the literature of the period. Rousseau was mentioned in the journals frequently, and poets honored him in their verses. Provincial academies set the eulogy of Jean-Jacques as the subject of their poetic competitions. This admiration for Rousseau was to be seen in the theatre, in plays based on the *Émile* and the *Héloïse*, and on his supposed after-life.¹² Even his former enemies, in their criticism of the literary expressions of the cult, had to admit the fanatical devotion of his disciples.¹³ That fanaticism was seriously tested in the controversy over Jean-Jacques' autobiographical *Confessions*, the first part of which was published in 1781. The frankness of the book provided fine ammunition for his enemies, but it only increased the loyalty and admiration of his disciples. They valiantly defended his

⁹ For the scope of this, see H. Buffenoir, *Les Portraits de Rousseau* (Paris, 1913); F. Girardin, *Iconographie de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Paris, 1908), and the collection, *Portraits de J.-J. Rousseau*, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, 2 vols.

¹⁰ Musée de Rousseau, Geneva. The motif of the author of the *Confessions* as Diogenes' honest man was used a number of times.

¹¹ Girardin, *op. cit.*, 148.

¹² The most interesting of these was Dériaux, *L'Ombre de J.-J. Rousseau, Comédie en Deux Actes et en Prose* (London, 1787).

¹³ See the review of the prize-winning "Ode sur la Mort de Rousseau" by P.-H. Duvigneau, in Fréron's *Année Littéraire*, V (1786), 169-89.

memory, explaining away his most damaging admissions.¹⁴ As La Harpe, one of Rousseau's *philosophe* enemies, wryly observed, they tolerated no criticism at all of their hero.¹⁵

Some of the disciples in this period were later to be prominent in the Revolution. Both Mme. de Staël and Mme. Roland wrote of their devotion to their "bon Jean-Jacques."¹⁶ So did the young Mirabeau in his letters to Sophie.¹⁷ Sylvain Maréchal and Babeuf, Charlotte Corday, the poet Roucher, and Barère were also among the new adherents to the literary cult in the 1780's. The most interesting literary disciple, however, was the Abbé Brizard, and his manuscripts on his "master" are quite revealing.¹⁸ One is the draft of a *Vie de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, in which the *Émile* is called the "masterpiece of the eighteenth century and perhaps of all centuries." Another is a Plutarchian comparison between Rousseau and Socrates, in which Rousseau is held to be superior to the Greek philosopher on a number of counts.

The literary cult had its pilgrimages to places where Rousseau had lived and worked, above all, to Ermenonville. Here in a setting that still excites the wonder of the visitor, Girardin had created an elaborate shrine, the center of which was Rousseau's tomb on the Isle of Poplars. In a guidebook to the place, Girardin wrote:

It is to you, friend of Rousseau, it is to you that I address myself; you alone are able to sense the affecting charm of such a site. In these solitary places, nothing can distract you from the object of your love; you see it; it is there, let your tears pour out; never will you have wept sweeter or more justifiable tears.¹⁹

That was no idle plea. Hundreds of disciples visited the place.²⁰

¹⁴ Comte de Barruel-Beauvert, *Vie de J.-J. Rousseau* (London, 1789), 186; J.-P. Brissot, *De la Vérité ou Méditations sur les Moyens de Parvenir à la Vérité dans Toutes les Connaissances Humaines* (Neuchâtel, 1782), 109-10.

¹⁵ J.-F. La Harpe, *Œuvres de La Harpe* (Paris, 1821), XV, 426.

¹⁶ Mme. de Staël, *Lettres sur les Ouvrages et le Caractère de J. J. Rousseau* (n. p., 1788), 37 and *passim*; *Mémoires de Madame Roland* (Paris, 1905), I, 148, 645, 662.

¹⁷ *Œuvres de Mirabeau*, ed. by M. Mérilhon, vols. IV-VI, *Lettres à Sophie* (Paris, 1834-5), IV, 30; V, 218-21, 351.

¹⁸ Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris, MS. 6099.

¹⁹ Stanislas Girardin, *Promenade ou Itinéraire des Jardins d'Ermenonville* (Paris, 1788), 24.

²⁰ F. Metra, *Correspondance Secrète, Politique et Littéraire . . .* (London, 1786-90), X (June 26, 1780), 26.

They came to weep, to pray, to kiss the tomb and decorate it with flowers, to compose verses about Rousseau; and one at least came to commit suicide and be buried close to Jean-Jacques. Relics of the departed *philosophe* were eagerly sought after, and a duchess spent an entire afternoon walking around the estate with Rousseau's wooden *sabots* on her delicate and aristocratic feet.²¹

Brizard has left a moving description of his pilgrimage to Ermenonville in 1783.²² When he came to the tomb, he fell to his knees and kissed the stone. He and his companions each paid tribute to the great man buried there, and spread flowers on the tomb. Then they tore out and burned the anti-Rousseauian pages from the revised edition of Diderot's *Essai sur Sénèque*, while proclaiming in a loud voice their reasons for so doing. The sombre location gave the scene an affecting and august setting, wrote Brizard. In describing a later visit, he wrote: "I converse with him [Rousseau], I call up his spirit, and talk with him. It is his soul that breathes in these places. It is he himself who has talked with me; . . . the divine Rousseau, a man so good so simple and sublime. . . ." ²³

That was the literary cult of Rousseau. It was Rousseau as the author of the *Nouvelle Héloïse* and the *Émile* that Brizard and the other disciples admired, while only a few individuals remembered that Jean-Jacques had also written political treatises. But revolution came to France in 1789 and the polite society in which the literary cult had flourished soon gave way to a new and harsher world. One of the results of that change was that a political cult of Rousseau as the author of the *Contrat social* and one of the founders of the Revolution very soon took the place of the literary cult.

This political cult was clearly a product of the Revolution. Instead of Rousseau making the Revolution, it would seem that the Revolution made Rousseau, or at least his reputation as a political philosopher.²⁴ Before 1789, the political cult was non-existent.

²¹ Brizard recorded many of these stories in his manuscript, "Pèlerinage d'Ermenonville," *loc. cit.*, 331-515.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 415.

²⁴ It can be argued that Rousseau had an indirect rather than direct influence on the Revolution through his appeal to the emotions, enthusiasm, and a belief in human perfectibility. See D. Mornet, *Des Origines Intellectuelles de la Révolution Française 1715-1787* (Paris, 1933), 228-30, 476.

The *Contrat social* had not been reprinted since 1775, not even during the years of fermentation 1788 and 1789. There was no widespread enthusiasm for the political Rousseau until 1790. In that year, four separate editions of the *Contrat social* were published, and three more in 1791.²⁵

The political cult was an impersonal mass phenomenon. Thousands paraded and sang in honor of Rousseau without having more than a vague idea as to just who Rousseau was or why he was being honored. Certain of his political ideas became popular, notably the concept (not necessarily liberal or democratic) of the General Will. But there was in this practically none of the intensely personal and emotional loyalty to the "bon Jean-Jacques" that there was in the literary cult. There were some followers who may honestly be called political disciples. But there were many others to whom the name Rousseau and the *Contrat social* were merely weapons for ideological battles. In a revolutionary situation wholly without precedent, and in factional struggles which achieved the ultimate in bitterness, the convenience of claiming the authority of Rousseau as justification for current policies was quickly realized by every party. Rousseau was adopted as a symbol at one time or another by all the political factions from conservative anti-revolutionaries to radical democrats. His prestige increased enormously as a result. But as an expression of first this and then that faction, the political cult could never achieve an independent existence or a rationale of its own.

Good revolutionists were quick to acknowledge the influence of the author of the *Contrat social* on the course of events, and some opponents of the Revolution disapprovingly concurred. But another surprisingly large and persuasive group of conservatives insisted that what Rousseau had proclaimed as indisputable political theory was just the opposite of what was being done. In their pamphlets and other writings, they quoted Rousseau against the practicability of attempting to free a people once enslaved and give them a democratic government, and against some of the specific reforms being adopted.²⁶ This point of view was bluntly heralded

²⁵ T. Dufour, *Recherches Bibliographiques sur les Œuvres Imprimées de J.-J. Rousseau* (Paris, 1925), I, 117-47.

²⁶ See for example: Comte Ferrand, *Adresse d'un Citoyen Très-Actif ou Questions Présentées aux États-Généraux du Manège, Vulgairement appelés Assemblée Nationale* (n. p., 1789). The Comte d'Antraigues claimed in his pamphlet, *Quelle Est la Situation de l'Assemblée Nationale?* (n. p., 1790) that Rousseau had given

in the titles of two of these pamphlets: *J.-J. Rousseau, aristocrate*,²⁷ and *L'Assemblée nationale convaincue d'erreur par J.-J. Rousseau*.²⁸

Because Rousseau himself had written in what seemed to be contradictory fashion and because his later writings seemed to be in complete disagreement with his earlier work, each faction could cite chapter and verse in support of its position. Thus these conservative pamphleteers were able to present what seemed to be a quite logical case. But the "logic of events" was on the side of those who were sure that France owed her Revolution to Rousseau,²⁹ that the *Contrat social* was the lever which was used to overthrow "the enormous colossus of despotism."³⁰ They paid no attention to the contentions of their opponents, and proceeded to demonstrate their loyalty to this new political cult of the author of the *Contrat social*.

During the first enthusiastic years of the Revolution, Rousseau was cited and quoted time and again in the National Assembly, and in the revolutionary press. The political cult was also expressed in the theatre. In one play of this period, the final scene was a civic ceremony in which the busts of Rousseau, Mirabeau, Voltaire and Louis XVI were honored. "Our great men, these are our gods!" proclaimed the presiding official.³¹

There was now a political iconography, replacing the symbols of the literary cult, and Rousseau and his *Contrat social* appeared in many of the prints of this period.³² His bust became a familiar sight at revolutionary ceremonies at the political clubs. The Montmorency Jacobin Club dedicated a monument to Rousseau in a ceremony in which a number of the more prominent disciples partici-

him a supplement to the *Contrat social* which supported the opposition to the Revolution. The *Mercure de France* announced: "If there exists a work diametrically opposed to the principles of the French constitution, it is certainly the *Contrat social*." No. 27 (July 3, 1790), 32-3.

²⁷ C.-F. Lenormant (Paris, 1790).

²⁸ N. p., 1792.

²⁹ *Jean-Jacques Rousseau des Champs-Élysées à la Nation Française* (n. p., n. d.).

³⁰ L.-S. Mercier, *De J.-J. Rousseau Considéré comme l'Un des Premiers Auteurs de la Révolution* (Paris, 1791), II, 99.

³¹ P.-J.-B. Chaussard, *La France Régénérée, Pièce Episodique en Vers et à Spectacle, Précédée d'un Prologue* (Paris, 1791).

³² In addition to the iconographic sources already cited, the Musée de Chaalis, near Ermenonville, should also be mentioned.

pated,³³ and Sylvain Maréchal, who had been a literary disciple, collected through the columns of the *Révolutions de Paris* in 1790 a subscription for a statue of Rousseau, for which a total of 2585 livres was promised.³⁴

Even more significant are the official honors bestowed upon Jean-Jacques in 1790 and 1791. A street in Paris was named for him and a section for his *Contrat social*.³⁵ Such changes must have been popular, for a well-dressed aristocrat, inquiring for the street by its old name shortly after the change, was rudely told by the residents that it was unknown.³⁶ A bust of Rousseau and a copy of the *Contrat social* were given a place of honor in the National Assembly,³⁷ but the political disciples wanted more than that, and the Assembly finally decreed, December 21, 1790, that a statue of him be erected, inscribed: "La Nation Française Libre à J.-J. Rousseau."³⁸ A movement was also begun to place his remains in the Pantheon, the revolutionary hall of fame. Petitions for this were presented before the Assembly, and it was eventually decreed that Rousseau should receive the honors of the Pantheon. But because of opposition from Girardin, who objected to the removal of the remains, the question of the actual transfer from Ermenonville was referred to a committee.³⁹

In this fashion the political cult of Rousseau was expressed in the first years of the Revolution. At the same time there was being

³³ *Fête Champêtre Célébrée à Montmorency, en l'Honneur de J.-J. Rousseau* . . . (Paris, 1791). There is a copy of the original inscription on the monument in the Musée de J.-J. Rousseau at Montmorency:

Philosophe doux et modeste,
Il a connu les droits de l'humanité.
C'est dans cette vallée,
Ou contemplant l'ouvrage de la Divinité,
Il a fait son Contrat social
LA BASE DE NOTRE CONSTITUTION.

³⁴ *Révolutions de Paris*, Nos. 31 and ff.

³⁵ A. Tuetey, *Répertoire Général des Sources Manuscrites de l'Histoire de Paris pendant la Révolution Française* (Paris, 1890-1914), II, 285; M. Tourneux, *Bibliographie de l'Histoire de Paris pendant la Révolution Française* (Paris, 1890-1913), II, 346.

³⁶ A. F. d'Allonville, *Mémoires secrets de 1770 à 1830* (Paris, 1838-45), II, 196.

³⁷ *Moniteur* (Réimpression), No. 174 (June 23, 1790), IV, 691.

³⁸ Archives Nationales, Paris, F¹⁷. 1056, doss. 9. This was the first official honoring of any *philosophe* by the Revolution.

³⁹ *Moniteur* (Réimpression), No. 242 (Aug. 30, 1791), IX, 523-6; Arch. Nat., C77. 761, pièce 22.

created a much larger and more inclusive cult of the Revolution itself, a lay cult of national and revolutionary patriotism and loyalty.⁴⁰ It adopted many of the forms and ceremonies of traditional religion such as sacred days, creeds, hymns and holy objects. The Revolution had its prophets as well, and it was as a part of this all-inclusive cult of the Revolution that the political cult of Rousseau as one of those prophets reached its climax in the next few years.

Opposing political factions still appealed to the authority of Rousseau, and more or less genuine disciples might be found in all of them. Amongst the conservatives were Girardin and Mme. de Staël, who, a literary disciple before the Revolution, now wrote that she had protested against the radical trend of events by going to Ermenonville and writing on Rousseau's tomb the quotation from his writings which declared that liberty is not worth the life of an innocent man.⁴¹

Despite the objections of Mme. de Staël and the conservatives, the Revolution became more and more radical, and new political groups dominated the scene. Of these the Girondins, the moderates of 1793, were perhaps the best representatives of the Rousseau cult. In this party were such Rousseauists as Charlotte Corday, the Abbé Fauchet, and the philosopher Condorcet. Some of them had been literary disciples before the Revolution, for example, Louvet, Brissot and Mme. Roland. Yet when the Girondins were overthrown, other disciples came into prominence and the cult continued. Among the Hébertist extremists, who wielded a good deal of power after the overthrow of the Girondins, were Clootz and Maréchal, both old disciples, and Chaumette, the mayor of Paris, who was a more recent convert.

The Jacobins are usually considered followers of Rousseau, and there is some justification for this. His admirers were to be found in all parts of the party. There was the radical Marat, who was said to have been one of the few to know and appreciate the *Contrat social* before the Revolution.⁴² Of the Dantonist moderates, Hér-

⁴⁰ See A. Mathiez, *Les Origines des Cultes Révolutionnaires (1789-1792)*, (Paris, 1904); and A. Aulard, *Le Culte de la Raison et le Culte de l'Être Suprême, 1793-1794* (Paris, 1909).

⁴¹ Staël Manuscripts, Bibl. Nat., Nouv. acq. fr., 1300, pièce 43.

⁴² Mallet du Pan, "Du Degré d'Influence qu'a eue la Philosophie Française sur la Révolution," *Mercure Britannique*, No. 13 (Feb. 21, 1799), quoted in Bernard Mallet, *Mallet du Pan and the French Revolution* (London, 1902), 358.

ault de Séchelles and Camille Desmoulins were disciples. But Maximilien Robespierre was both the most famous Jacobin and the most famous disciple of them all. His religion of the Supreme Being may very well have been derived, at least in part, from Rousseau; and there is a story that on the eve of his downfall he too made the pilgrimage to Ermenonville and denounced those who had persecuted his Jean-Jacques.⁴³ Although there is no evidence that he (or anyone else for that matter) was a slavish follower of Rousseau's ideas, he often cited Jean-Jacques in support of his own policies, and eulogized him on a number of occasions. At the height of his power, he had this to say of Rousseau:

Among those in the period of which I speak who are distinguished in the career of letters and philosophy, one man, by the elevation of his soul and the grandeur of his character, showed himself worthy of the position of teacher of the human race. . . . Ah! if he had witnessed this revolution of which he was the precursor . . . who can doubt that his generous soul would have embraced with rapture the cause of justice and equality?⁴⁴

These are individual and personal expressions of the political cult during the extreme phase of the Revolution, but the collective and impersonal manifestations were even more important. The *Contrat social* itself was published thirteen times between 1792 and 1795, and one edition was appropriately issued in pocket Bible size for the use of the soldiers defending *la patrie*.⁴⁵ Collections of extracts were equally popular, the editor of one of them expressing the hope that the *Contrat social* rather than the sword would overthrow the thrones of Europe.⁴⁶ Books, eulogies, poems and hymns were written in Rousseau's honor. One of these hymns declared:

Car ses écrits, depuis sa Mort
Ont déjà fait des grands miracles.⁴⁷

Another gave the assurance:

Le françois libre te chérit.
Tu lui créas une Patrie.⁴⁸

⁴³ Louis Gillet, "La Collection Girardin au Musée de Chaalis, le Reliquaire de Jean-Jacques," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 7^{ème} période, XXXIX (1925), 159; and letter to author by Louis Gillet, Dec. 20, 1939.

⁴⁴ *Moniteur* (Réimpression), No. 229 (May 8, 1794), XX, 408.

⁴⁵ Paris: Josse ed., 1794. Copy owned by R. H. Cobb, Tunbridge Wells, England.

⁴⁶ J.-E. Forestier de Boinvilliers, *L'Esprit du Contrat social, suivi de l'Esprit du Sens commun de Th. Paine* (Paris, an II).

⁴⁷ Piis, "L'Apothéose de J.-J. Rousseau," *Bibl. Nat.*, Vm⁷. 16847.

The cult continued to find an effective sounding board in the theatre. Sometimes Jean-Jacques himself appeared, as a brave and revolutionary lad in Geneva,⁴⁹ or as a prophet denouncing fanaticism.⁵⁰ Several Rousseauan almanacs were published,⁵¹ and J. stood for Jean-Jacques in a revolutionary alphabet book.⁵²

The iconography of Rousseau flourished now as it never had before. His bust appeared everywhere, even in a little cache of articles, most of them religious, found behind the Tuileries chapel after the overthrow of the monarchy.⁵³ The portrait of the author of the *Contrat social* was even more familiar, either as a simple likeness or as a complicated piece of symbolism such as the engraving, "Résurrection de Jean-Jacques Rousseau," in which he appeared climbing from his tomb, presumably to enjoy the revolutionary millennium.⁵⁴ He was also represented in classical garb, holding his *Contrat social*, as one of the four sages who replaced the kings, now taboo, on patriotic playing cards.⁵⁵

In these later years of the Revolution, Rousseau continued to be a patron saint in the political clubs. That does not mean, however, that his ideas necessarily had a profound influence on their deliberations. On one occasion, it was pointed out that experience rather than philosophy should be relied upon, that "the divine Jean-Jacques" might even be quoted against himself.⁵⁶ But on the other hand he was often quoted and eulogized, and his bust held an honored place in the club rooms—in the Paris Jacobin Club, for instance—much longer than those of other, more transient revolu-

⁴⁸ Simien, "Aux Mânes de J.-J. Rousseau," *Almanach des Grâces, dédié à la Plus Belle, Étrennes Érotiques et Patriotiques, Chantantes, An III* (Paris, 1795), 254-6.

⁴⁹ Andrieux, *L'Enfance de Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Comédie en Un Acte, mêlée de Musique* (Paris, an II).

⁵⁰ Aulard, *op. cit.*, 190.

⁵¹ Bulard, *Almanach de J.-J. Rousseau ou des Bons Ménages* (Paris, 1793); C.-A. Fusil, *Sylvain Maréchal ou l'Homme sans Dieu H. S. D. 1750-1803* (Paris, 1936), 51-2, 57-9.

⁵² M. Dreyfous, *Les Arts et les Artistes pendant la Période Révolutionnaire (1789-1795)* (Paris, n. d.), 248.

⁵³ Arch. Nat., F⁷. 4408.

⁵⁴ Musée de Rousseau, Geneva; Collection Girardin, Musée de Chaalis.

⁵⁵ Musée de J.-J. Rousseau, Montmorency.

⁵⁶ A. Aulard, ed., *La Société des Jacobins, Recueil de Documents pour l'Histoire du Club des Jacobins de Paris* (Paris, 1889-97), IV, 273-9.

tionary heroes. The clubs also honored Rousseau and the other revolutionary idols with processions, hymns and orations.

This second period of the Revolution (roughly 1791-94) brought further governmental honors to the author of the *Contrat social*. Local authorities gave his name and those of his works to towns and streets all over France, and honored him and his fellow heroes with elaborate ceremonies. His bust was a standard fixture at such events; in fact it was a familiar sight at the many patriotic ceremonies of this period. He had a place in the proceedings inaugurating the Worship of Reason in 1794. At one of these a hymn was sung, which included this couplet:

Convenez en, mes bons amis:
Rousseau vaut mieux que saint Pierre.⁵⁷

At another celebration, the *Contrat social* was called the cornerstone of the temple of liberty.⁵⁸ The bust of Rousseau looked down on the deliberations of the Legislative Assembly of 1791-92, and frequent appeals were made to his authority. "As Rousseau proves in his *Contrat social*," ran the argument of one orator,⁵⁹ while another arose in the middle of a complicated discussion to say: "I wish to read an article of the *Contrat social* in which is to be found the complete solution of the question."⁶⁰ In the sorely beset and more practical Convention which ruled France between 1792 and 1795, Rousseau was apparently cited less often, and there was little evidence of honoring Jean-Jacques for his own sake. This is amply proved by the outcome of the two decrees of the National Assembly, one for a statue, and the other for the still delayed honors of the Pantheon.

Because of the opposition to removing Rousseau's remains from Ermenonville, no action on the pantheonization decree was taken until France was a republic and aristocrats such as Girardin were under suspicion. Then the project was revived, first in the Paris Jacobin Club, and then by a series of petitions to the Convention. Internal strife intervened, however, and again action was postponed, this time until after the overthrow of Robespierre in Thermidor (July, 1794). Though he had been the most conspicuous

⁵⁷ Aulard, *Le Culte de la Raison et le Culte de l'Être Suprême*, p. 120.

⁵⁸ Dorat Cubièrre Palmaizeaux, *Hymnes Civiques pour Être Chantées . . . à la Fête de l'Être Suprême . . .*, quoted in Fusil, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

⁵⁹ *Archives Parlementaires*, I^e série, XXXVIII, 147.

⁶⁰ *Moniteur* (Réimpression), No. 147 (May 26, 1792), XII, 479.

political disciple of Rousseau, Robespierre's death seems to have hastened the ceremony of pantheonization. It was said that he had delayed that honor out of jealousy.⁶¹ So the Convention, after a report by Lakanal for the Committee of Public Instruction on September 14, ordered that Rousseau's remains be brought from Ermenonville and placed in the Pantheon with appropriate ceremony.⁶² Thus the rulers of France expressed their dislike of Robespierre, their desire to replace him in public esteem with another hero, and their continued loyalty to the basic principles of the Revolution.

The preparations for the ceremony, which included decorations, illuminations, sculptures, a replica of the Isle of Poplars, and hymns commissioned for the occasion, were elaborate and detailed.⁶³ A cortège composed of officials, musicians and various delegations accompanied the remains from Ermenonville, and there were appropriate celebrations at each of the stops en route. On its arrival in Paris, the coffin was placed on the replica of the Isle of Poplars which had been erected in the Tuileries gardens.

The ceremony of pantheonization took place on October 11. There was a special service in the Convention, and then a procession to the Pantheon. In the line of march were mounted police, a band playing Rousseau's compositions, and various groups, each with an appropriately inscribed standard: botanists, artists and artisans, mothers and children, war orphans, and Genevans. The *Contrat social*, the "beacon of legislators," was carried on a velvet cushion, and a statue of its author in a cart pulled by twelve horses. At the Pantheon, a civic hymn was sung, the president of the Convention delivered a eulogy, and ended the ceremony by placing flowers on the coffin. That evening there was dancing on the Place du Panthéon, and the theatres presented the favorite Rousseau plays, and a new one, *La fête de J.-J. Rousseau*, written especially for the occasion.

The ceremony had aroused a good deal of belated enthusiasm for the cult. Similar celebrations were held in Lyons, Dijon and elsewhere, and a medal was struck in honor of the event. A Société

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, No. 338 (Aug. 25, 1794), XXI, 574.

⁶² *Ibid.*, No. 362 (Sept. 18, 1794), XXI, 769-73.

⁶³ Arch. Nat., F⁴. 2090 and F⁴. 1246. The best account of the ceremony is to be found in the *Feuille Villageoise*, No. 5 (Oct. 16, 1794), IX, 65-7; No. 6 (Oct. 21, 1794), IX, 88-91.

des Amis de Jean-Jacques Rousseau was organized. An *Almanach des plus belles pensées de J.-J. Rousseau* appeared, and pamphlets were written about the tomb at Ermenonville, one writer proposing that it now be inscribed: "Surrexit, Non est Hic."⁶⁴

The special reasons for holding the ceremony at this particular time have been mentioned. It was not an anti-Terror move. Nevertheless the conservative Thermidorians made much of it as a repudiation of Jacobin extremism and terrorism, and their pamphlets cited Rousseau against the Terror. Marat became the *bête noire* of the Thermidorians, and his bust, long a familiar sight, was the object of attack by the reactionary Jeunesse Dorée, who substituted for it the figure of Rousseau; sometimes they burned a piece of paper on the pedestal as a symbolical purification.⁶⁵ It is easy to see why Rousseau's bust tripled in price as a result of this partisan popularity.⁶⁶ In the midst of this enthusiasm, the plans for a statue of Rousseau were revived, and the sculptor was actually chosen.⁶⁷ The statue, however, was never erected.

The political cult gradually declined during the period of the Directory (1795-99). There were now only a few pilgrims to the empty tomb at Ermenonville. Authors quoted and cited Rousseau, but sometimes against the Revolution, and the *Contrat social* was condemned as a dangerous book.⁶⁸ There were still a few earnest disciples of Jean-Jacques however. A member of the legislature proclaimed his belief that a few passages from the *Contrat social* might counteract the growing anti-revolutionary sentiment.⁶⁹ Babeuf cited Rousseau in support of his pseudo-communistic principles, and when on trial appealed in his defense to the "immortal author of the *Contrat social*."⁷⁰ And there was the Director Revelière-lépeaux, in whose civic religion of Theophilanthropy the memory of Rousseau had a prominent place.⁷¹ But when Bona-

⁶⁴ *Journal des Hommes Libres*, Oct. 27, 1794, quoted in *La Révolution Française*, XXXIII (1897), 571.

⁶⁵ A. Aulard, *Paris pendant la Réaction Thermidorienne et sous le Directoire*, *Recueil des Documents pour l'Histoire de l'Esprit Public à Paris* (Paris, 1898-1902), I, 444-5, 449-50, 451, 463, 468.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 451.

⁶⁷ Arch. Nat., F¹⁷. 1281, doss. 10.

⁶⁸ Jacques Louault, *Du Contrat social* (Paris, an V), ii-iii.

⁶⁹ *Moniteur* (Réimpression), No. 283 (July 1, 1795), XXV, 102.

⁷⁰ *Moniteur* (Original), No. 230 (May 9, 1797), XVI, 919.

⁷¹ A. Mathiez, *La Théophilanthropie et le Culte Décadaire (1796-1801)* (Paris, 1903), 94.

parte seized control of the bankrupt Revolution in 1799, the collapse of the cult was hastened. The Corsican opportunist had no sympathy for cults of dead philosophers. In fact, during a visit to Ermenonville, he declared that it would have been better for France if Rousseau had never lived.⁷²

It is interesting to note that as the political cult declined the eclipsed literary cult began to reappear with a renewed interest in the *Émile* and its educational theories, and in the *Héloïse* with its familiar themes of pure love and devotion. But the literary cult had been the logical product of the Ancien Régime, and just as that period in French history could never return, so the literary cult could never be completely revived. The magic of the *Émile* and the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, which had so deeply affected an earlier generation, was gone. As the Revolution declined and disappeared, the cult of its "first founder" likewise suffered.

Why was there a cult of Rousseau in the second half of the eighteenth century? The best answer would seem to be that there was a need for it, and there was a favorable environment for such a phenomenon. The cult was a part and product of the milieu of the period. Its transformation from a literary to a political cult and its eventual decline may be ascribed to successive changes in that milieu. The last years of the Ancien Régime were a period of unrest in which this sort of popular cult is apt to flourish. The "bon Jean-Jacques" in his *Nouvelle Héloïse* and *Émile* provided a romantic, emotional, and unorthodox approach to life—an escape for which that generation was searching. Thus was born the literary cult, complete with pilgrims, shrine and iconography. The Revolution of 1789 marked a turning point, and a political cult of Rousseau as the author of the *Contrat social* became possible as it had not been before that date. Yet in the political cult, with its extravagant and conflicting manifestations, there was something of the same romanticism that had characterized the earlier cult.

The French Revolution itself was in part the product of an essentially romantic political philosophy and ideology. The political cult of Rousseau, a product of the first, enthusiastic years of the Revolution, helped provide a rationale, a symbol, and a channel of expression for this new ideology. Eventually a cult of the Revolution came into being, and the political cult of Rousseau became

⁷² *Mémoires, Journal et Souvenirs de S. Girardin* (Paris, 1829), I, 190.

institutionalized as a part of it, serving as a subsidiary to it. That was to its advantage. As the Revolution progressed, so did the cult of Rousseau. It would never have persisted without that connection. Yet at the same time it could never escape from the revolutionary setting, and when the Revolution declined and disappeared, so the cult of its "first founder" came to an end.⁷³

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⁷³ The revolutionary tradition has continued, however, and thus certain features of the political cult of Rousseau have reappeared from time to time, for instance in the celebrations of Bastille Day during the period of the Popular Front in 1936.

